DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 361 626 CG 025 021

AUTHOR Weyand, Tricia; And Others
TITLE A Communication and Lifeskills Training Group for At-Risk Students. Project Seed.
INSTITUTION Maine Center for Educational Services.
PUB DATE Jul 93
NOTE 7p.; For other titles in this series, see CG 025 019-026.
PUB TYPE Guides - Classroom Use - Teaching Guides (For Teacher) (052)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Communication Skills; *High Risk Students; *Interpersonal Communication; *Interpersonal Competence; Junior High Schools; *Junior High School Students; *Self Esteem

ABSTRACT

One of eight papers from Project Seed, this paper describes a communication and lifeskills training group designed to strengthen student self-esteem and the communication skills needed to successfully survive within the school environment. The project described was developed through the collaboration of a behavioral teacher and a school guidance counselor in an attempt to help seventh- and eighth-grade students having behavior difficulties in their struggle to learn critical communication skills. Program goals and anticipated outcomes of the weekly meetings are described. Procedures and instructions are provided in six steps: (1) identify the at-risk students; (2) provide a safe and consistent meeting place for students; (3) set clear and specific group rules; (4) start the group slowly with non-threatening activities; (5) be prepared to repeat material often; and (6) use resources and choose activities that seem appropriate to the mood of the group. Resources for use in the program are described and the project cost is estimated to amount to about $100 for the first year. (NB)

****
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
****

ED 361 626

CG

A COMMUNICATION AND LIFESKILLS TRAINING GROUP FOR AT-RISK STUDENTS

Tricia Weyand, Erin O'Brien, Elizabeth Stewart
Massabesic Junior High School
Box 460. West Road
Waterboro, ME 04087
Tel: (207) 247-6121

Project SEED

the Center
Maine Center for Educational Services

CG025021

PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY
P. Weyand

TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Office of Educational Research and Improvement
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)
☐ This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.
☐ Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.
• Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official OERI position or policy.

A Communication and Lifeskills Training group for At-Risk Students

Using group interaction activities, games, films and creative role-play, the teacher, teacher aid, counselor and students involved in this training group work together to strengthen self-esteem and the communication skills needed to successfully survive within the school environment.

Participants

This project was developed through the collaboration of a behavioral teacher and a school guidance counselor in an attempt to help students with behavior difficulties in their constant struggle to learn critical communication skills. It became apparent that these students were operating on a divide and conquer basis both within their own classroom and with the adults in their world. The group originally comprised of a group of seventh and eighth grade students.

Who might consider adapting this program?

Educators who identify students at any grade level, whose lack of socially appropriate behavior or low self-esteem puts them at-risk of school failure, may want to adapt this program and work in conjunction with home and school.

Program Goals

The underlying assumption of this program is that when students learn to know and trust themselves it will increase their knowledge and trust of others. Hopefully this in turn leads them to a better understanding of socially appropriate behavior.

The intention of the weekly meetings is to provide students with a setting where they are expected to be accountable to themselves and to each other. A safe place where they can express feelings and opinions and simultaneously learn skills to deal with their problems.

Outcomes

This was the pilot year for this project and from here we would like to see the group become built into the curriculum for the following year.

Our hope is that students will learn to deal with conflicts in their daily lives more independently, gradually learning to let go of supports.

We would like to find ways to include parents who are the other important group of adults involved in these students lives. We hope to develop possible monthly breakfasts or informational meetings with them.

We would also like to develop a photographic scrapbook so that students could look back at their progress over the year and reflect on their own growth.

Procedures and Instructions

1. Identify a group of students considered to be at-risk of school failure. These students lack patience and yet need it in vast quantities. They are used to breaking rules but cannot tolerate people breaking theirs. A high Adult/Student ratio is critical to the success of the group, if possible the ratio should not exceed 1:3.

2. Provide a safe consistent meeting place where students will be undisturbed and therefore more likely to be able to express their creativity. Our group met weekly for approximately 1 hour in a classroom in a group circle. With time and success we planned to have some more intimate meetings in the counselor's office.

3. Set clear and specific group rules and follow through immediately if any are broken. It is valuable to have students participate in setting these rules.

4. Start the group slowly with non-threatening activities. Staff needs to be flexible and spontaneous yet responsive to the needs of the moment. The norming and storming stages of this group will inevitably take much longer than that necessary for less impulsive students. Issues of trust, fairness and attention seeking behavior are constant. While striving towards the overall goal that students will learn socially appropriate behavior staff need to be willing to drop their agenda if it becomes too threatening to the students.

5. Be prepared to repeat material often, perhaps in a different form. Progress is slow and needs constant reinforcement for these students. The attrition rate can be high, due to moving or changes in programming, therefore much time should be spent re-assessing group dynamics.

6. Use resources listed later in this packet, but also be creative with choosing activities that seem appropriate to the mood of the group.

Duration

We ran our group weekly throughout the school year. Sometimes a meeting took the form of a group breakfast. On a bad day we sometimes had to curtail sessions. We are planning towards more regular integration of parents.

Resources

MATERIALS

Early ice-breaker activities:-

* Story of the warm fuzzies. (Teen version.)

* Communication circle.

Students draw in turn around their hand on a large piece of paper, making sure that each hand connects eventually forming a circle. Students write what they think creates trust for them within the group setting on the palm of each hand and what breaks it on the outside of the circle. What is written should then be discussed, respecting the right of each student to pass if they prefer.

* Communication Web.

A ball of yarn is passed around from one group member to another till it arrives back to the first player. As each member takes the yarn they answer a simple open-ended question such as.. " When I came to school this morning I felt.....". Follow with discussion of how we all connect and affect each others ability to function as a group.

* Talking, Feeling & Doing Game. A psychotherapeutic game for children. 155 County Road.
Cresskill, N.J. 07626

* The Un-game.

* 101 Support Group Activities for Teens at-Risk of Chemical Dependency or Related Problems.
Martin Fleming. Johnson Inst. 1992. Particularly useful pages 47 & 26.

* Fast Forward. A Problem Solving Program for Teens.
Walch Pub. Portland. (Page 14. Self-esteem inventory)

* Camcorder. Used to video group sessions and review behavior with students.

Outside Resources

Bureau of Instruction. Maine Dept. of Edc. Division of Alcohol & Drug Edc. Services. We borrowed films from here.

* "Why is it always me?"
* " Self-Esteem." 1988 NEFF Productions.

Project Cost

This project can operate on very little funding, though if the school could budget $100.00 for the first year it would cover the cost of a few games, books, film etc.. We are planning to use our grant money to increase our resources (puppets, supplies for parent meetings etc..)

Conclusion

Learning to get along in school requires trust in self and others, the ability to manage conflict without violence, and a sense of belonging. At times it has seemed that we are getting nowhere, we constantly learn through experience. Yet we have been able to see the growth of trust between group members. We have seen them gradually manage to confront each other with their feelings and insecurities and we have witnessed the beginnings of them offering peer support. One group member independently researched and presented to the group on the topic of self-esteem. We felt great encouragement when she became a member of the softball team. A great strength lies in the consistency provided by the teacher and counselor working together. This project provides the oportunity to begin to develop skills necessary for the rest of the students' lives.